

Message Text

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SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN VIEWS DEVELOPMENTS IN VIET-NAM

SUMMARY: OUTGOING AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR TO VIET-NAM, DAVID WILSON, EXPRESSES OPINIONS ON THAT COUNTRY'S INTERNAL WORKINGS AND FOREIGN RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBOFF MET AUGUST 31 WITH AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR DAVID WILSON, WHO RECENTLY DEPARTED POST IN HANOI. ALSO PRESENT WAS NEW AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR TO SRV JOHN BROOKE. WILSON CONVEYED HIS OBSERVATIONS ON SEVERAL SUBJECTS OF INTEREST CONCERNING VIET-NAM.

2. GOVERNMENT/PARTY. IT REMAINS VERY DIFFICULT TO FIGURE OUT WHAT IS HAPPENING WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP, WILSON SAID. IN WHAT HE SAYS AND IS REPORTED DOING, PRIMIN PHAM VAN DONG APPEARS TO BE A MODERATE, PRAGMATIC INDIVIDUAL, ALTHOUGH WILSON NOTED THAT ALBANIAN ENVOY IN HANOI HAD EXPRESSED SURPRISE OVER WHAT HE CONSIDERED THE LESS THAN MODERATE TONE OF DONG'S PRINCIPAL SPEECH IN COLOMBO. FIRST SECRETARY
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LE DUAN IS STILL SOMEWHAT MYSTERIOUS, GIVING THE APPEARANCE

OF AN OLD MOVIE STAR; ONE WONDERS WHETHER HE IS IN AS FULL COMMAND AS HIS TITLE IMPLIES. NO ONE KNOWS WHAT VICE PREMIER VO NGUYEN GIAP IS REALLY DOING; HE DOES SEEM TO FOCUS HIS ATTENTION ON THE ARMY. WILSON QUESTIONED WHETHER NATIONAL ASSEMBLY LEADER TRUONG CHINH IS AS INFLUENTIAL INSIDE PARTY CIRCLES AS SOME ARE ONCE AGAIN MAKING HIM OUT TO BE.

3. RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT. RECONSTRUCTION CERTAINLY APPEARS TO BE TAKING PLACE, ALTHOUGH WITH IT, LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE, THINGS MOVE VERY SLOWLY. AS EXAMPLE, WILSON CITED DRIVING NORTH OF HANOI TO VINH YEN OVER AN EIGHTEEN MONTH PERIOD. ONE DEFINITELY SAW THERE NEW FACTORIES WHICH HAVE BEEN CONSTRUCTED RECENTLY, ALTHOUGH WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE ACTUALLY OPERATING IS ANOTHER MATTER. HE UNDERSTANDS HIGHWAY AROUND VINH IS IN TERRIBLE CONDITION, BECOMING WORSE TO THE SOUTH OF THAT CITY. WITH HAIPHONG'S NINE BERTHS ANTIQUATED AND THE HARBOR HOPELESSLY CLOGGED UP, VIETNAMESE SEEM TO INTEND TO DEVELOP SERIES OF COASTAL PORTS IN THE FUTURE, INCLUDING VINH, WHERE ALREADY THERE IS SAID TO BE CONSIDERABLE ACTIVITY. CEMENT IS IN VERY SHORT SUPPLY, AS DEMONSTRATED BY THE STRUGGLE AUSTRALIANS HAD TO WAGE TO OBTAIN CEMENT A BAG AT A TIME FOR USE IN REPAIRING THE VILLA INTO WHICH THEY HAVE JUST MOVED.

4. MILITARY. ALTHOUGH SOME DEMOBILIZATION HAS UNDOUBTEDLY TAKEN PLACE, VIETNAMESE SEEM TO WANT TO KEEP THE SKILLS OF MILITARY PERSONNEL TOGETHER IN ONE ORGANIZATION. GIAP APPEARS TO BE INVOLVED WITH THE MILITARY'S DUTIES IN RECONSTRUCTION. NEW RECRUITMENT DRIVE LAUNCHED SEVERAL WEEKS AGO HAS HANOI DIPLOMATS PUZZLED; NO ONE KNOWS REAL REASONS FOR IT OR NUMBERS INVOLVED.

5. RELATIONS WITH BIG POWERS. FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT HANOI WANTS RELATIONS WITH THE US, WILSON THOUGHT THAT SRV UNDERSTANDS SENSITIVITIES ON THIS ISSUE IN THE US. EFFORTS AT STRENGTHENING RELATIONS WITH EUROPE ARE BEING MADE NOT JUST TO ENCOURAGE THE US TO FALL INTO LINE BUT BECAUSE THEY ARE IMPORTANT IN THEIR OWN RIGHT TO HANOI. ALTHOUGH ONE FEELS THE HISTORICAL ANTI-PATHY TOWARD THE NORTHERN NEIGHBOR, RELATIONS WITH CHINA DO NOT SEEM TO BE AS BAD AS SOME RUMORS WOULD SUGGEST. DESPITE THE ISLANDS ISSUE, CONFIDENTIAL

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PRC NON-FOOD AID IS CONTINUING. PRC AMBASSADOR TOLD WILSON THAT "PACE OF VIETNAMESE RECONSTRUCTION" WORRIES HIS COUNTRY, MEANING THE LEVEL OF SOVIET ASSISTANCE IN THAT RECONSTRUCTION. RELATIONS WITH SOVIETS ARE HELPED BY DISTANCE BETWEEN THE TWO. SOVIETS AND EASTERN EUROPEANS FREQUENTLY COMPLAIN ABOUT THEIR FRUSTRATIONS IN WORKING WITH THE VIETNAMESE.

6. RELATIONS WITH INDOCHINESE NEIGHBORS. ALTHOUGH IT IS

UNCERTAIN HOW MUCH INDEPENDENCE THE SRV ACCORDS LAOS, THE VIETNAMESE WOULD CERTAINLY INTERVENE, WERE THERE ANY THREAT TO THAT REGIME. WILSON DID NOT THINK VIET-NAM WANTS THE EXPENSE OF HAVING TO SUPPLY LAOS OVER THE MOUNTAIN ROUTES BUT WOULD PREFER THAT THAI OPEN UP BORDER POINTS WITH LAOS. CAMBODIA AND VIET-NAM SEEM TO HAVE REACHED A MODUS VIVENDI, JUDGING FROM UPSWING IN TONE OF MESSAGES BETWEEN THE TWO IN RECENT MONTHS. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT LE DUAN AND PARTY RETURNED FROM VISIT TO CAMBODIA LAST SUMMER FARILY DISCOURAGED OVER POSSIBILITY OF WORKING EASILY WITH THAT COUNTRY'S NEW GOVERNMENT BUT THAT SRV LEADERSHIP NOW RECONCILED TO WORKING TOGETHER WITH CAMBODIANS IN RATHER PERMANENTLY UNEASY RELATIONSHIP.

7. RELATIONS WITH SOUTHEAST ASIA. THERE IS PROBABLY A NEW POLICY RATHER THAN SIMPLY CHANGE IN TACTICS WITH RESPECT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA. THAI-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS HAVE ONLY ADVANCED ONE STEP, BUT AT LEAST IT IS A STEP. BOTH PHAM VAN DONG AND VICE FOREIGN MINISTER PHAN HIEN TOLD WILSON DURING HIS FAREWELL CALLS THAT THEY REALIZE PRESSURES THAI CIVILIAN OFFICIALS ARE UNDER FROM "MILITARISTS" AND NOTED THAT THEY ARE TRYING TO HELP THESE OFFICIALS SUCCEED. THEY BELIEVE FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHAI IS GENUINELY SINCERE IN HIS EFFORTS, WITH PRIMIN SENI PRESSURED BY SO MANY FORCES THAT HE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE VERY STRONG. FOR WHATEVER OTHER REASONS VIETNAMESE INAUGURATED NEW POLICY OF FRIENDSHIP TOWARD SOUTHEAST ASIA, IMPORTANT FACTOR WAS THEIR GENUINE DESIRE FOR AID AND TRADE RELATIONSHIPS WITH COUNTRIES OF THE REGION.

8. THE FUTURE. DESPITE CONSIDERABLE TALK THAT VIET-NAM WILL BE ASIA'S YUGOSLAVIA, IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT IT WILL BE ASIA'S ROMANIA, I.E., WORKING WITHIN THE SYSTEM, WITH A STALIST ECONOMY. AT LEAST THERE IS NOT THE "PERMANENT
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REVOLUTION" CONCEPT IN MOTION AS IN CHINA, ALTHOUGH IT COULD COME IS INTERNAL PROBLEMS WORSEN. THE SOUTH WILL PROBABLY BE SUBJECTED TO THE RIGIDITIES ON HANOI'S THEORIES, BUT IT IS NOT YET CLEAR AS TO THE DEGREE, WILSON CONCLUDED.
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